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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIEV 001192

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINR SOCI

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: IN ORANGE RIVNE OBLAST, TYMOSHENKO
OUTWORKED OUR UKRAINE

Classified By: Political Counselor Aubrey Carlson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) The March 26 elections in western Ukraine's Rivne Oblast were the cleanest in the region's post-independence history, according to NGO representatives, OSCE election monitors and local media reports. There were administrative glitches that lengthened both the voting and counting. The OSCE long-term observer (LTO) for Rivne told us March 27 of credible allegations of attempted vote-buying in some city council races; in Rivne city, the EKO25 party allegedly offered people up to 50 hryvnias (10 USD) for their votes. With 90 percent of Rivne's parliamentary ballots tallied, former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko's bloc, BYuT, is leading President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc, taking 31% of the vote to OU's 25%; Rivne media have characterized BYuT's victory as a major upset. Local NGO contacts asserted that BYuT won because the charismatic Tymoshenko campaigned hard in the oblast, wooing voters with populist promises to hike pensions and punish "bandits." In contrast, senior OU figures spent little time stumping in Rivne, opting to rely on heavy radio and TV advertising in the heretofore solidly pro-Yushchenko region. End summary.

Fairest of Them All

2. (SBU) According to NGO officials, OSCE election monitors and local media reports, the March 26 parliamentary and local elections in western Ukraine's Rivne Oblast were the cleanest in the region's post-independence history. The OSCE long-term observer (LTO) for Rivne, recapping reports from OSCE observer teams throughout the oblast, told us on March 27 that, as was the case nationwide, there were minor administrative glitches that slowed both the voting and the counting (reftel).

3. (SBU) The most common hiccup, the LTO noted, was long lines. Rivne's leading independent newspaper, Rivnenska Hazeta, reported on March 27 that even Mayor Viktor Chaika and Governor Vasyl Chervoniy had to queue up at their respective polling stations. The LTO also said, nonetheless, that turnout was strong in the oblast; Rivnenska Hazeta put turnout at 70 percent and featured a front-page story about a dedicated young woman who voted only two hours after giving birth (to a healthy 8.4-pound baby girl).

Allegations of Vote-Buying in City Council Races

4. (C) According to the LTO, there were a few reports of vote-buying in local races. For example, one OSCE observer team was pulled aside by a polling station chairwoman in Rivne city and told that representatives of the party EKO25 had been going door to door in neighboring apartment buildings offering people 15 hryvnias (3 USD) to vote for the party on the city council ballot. The chairwoman alleged that EKO25 activists had significantly upped the bribe, to 50 hryvnias (10 USD), during election-eve canvassing on March 25. Bribe-taking voters were reportedly warned that EKO25 activists would be checking individual polling station results and would "be back for their money" if protocols showed zero votes for the party.

BYuT Whips Our Ukraine...

5. (SBU) With 90 percent of Rivne's parliamentary ballots tallied, former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko's eponymous bloc BYuT appears to have thrashed President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine (OU) in the oblast, taking 31% of the vote to OU's 25%. Rivne is part of the solidly pro-Yushchenko "Orange" heartland, and, according to media reports and local NGO representatives, OU had been expected to easily take first place the oblast. The Rivne media have generally characterized the BYuT win as a major upset that has stunned OU's local leadership.

...Because of Yuliya's Barnstorming

16. (SBU) Contacts from local NGOs, including the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, asserted to us March 27 that BYuT won largely because Yuliya Tymoshenko personally campaigned in Rivne, holding populist rallies in the oblast at which she promised, among other things, to boost pensions and "punish bandits." In contrast, our contacts observed, top OU figures spent little time stumping through Rivne. The party relied instead on radio and TV advertising to motivate voters.
Herbst